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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether, when both listener and speaker are unknown to one another, listeners of each sex do or do not tend to differentially evaluate presentations by speakers according to sex; results were then compared to those of earlier studies in which the women being judged were hypothetical authors. A group of 102 male and female students in undergraduate public speaking classes were asked to evaluate presentations by male and female communicators as a regular aspect of the course. Results indicated that students demonstrate no prejudice toward communicators of either sex, even when the communicators are personally unknown, suggesting that stereotypes relied on for judgments of source play a lesser role when a real woman is the message source because other information is available to use in judging the individual. Comparison to earlier studies shows that judgments about the performance of females differ considerably depending on whether the women being judged are real or hypothetical; earlier generalizations that women are in general prejudiced against other women appear to be unfounded. (DF)

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Are Women Really Prejudiced Against Women?: A Reconsideration

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Are Women Really Prejudiced Against Women?: A Reconsideration

Few studies have had as much effect on the literature and thinking of an area as Goldberg's article "Are Women Prejudiced Against Women?" has had on the study of sex-based perceptions.¹ Beautifully written, eminently quotable, this single study stands as the most widely cited evidence that women are their own worst enemies. The results ostensibly demonstrate that the female is far more critical of scholarly work attributed to other females than of the identical work attributed to a male.

Goldberg began by asking 100 women at Connecticut College to rank order a number of academic fields. While the precise details of the survey were not given, the object was to ascertain whether each field was considered a predominately male or female discipline. He discovered that dietetics, for example, was seen as a feminine field while law was seen as a masculine field. Six fields were chosen for use in the main study: dietetics and elementary-school teaching (feminine), art history and linguistics (neutral), and city planning and law (masculine).

Forty other female students were then given the task of reading an academic journal article from each of the six disciplines. Unknown to the women, the author identification had been systematically varied

for each article. In half the articles on one topic, for example, the author was shown as John T. McKay; in the other half the author was shown as Joan T. McKay. This procedure was carried out for all six articles. No other mention was made of author gender, nor was there any attention focused on the sex of the author. Each of the 40 women judged every article on nine different criteria, e. g., writing style, professional competence of the author, persuasiveness of the article, etc. In all, there were six articles and nine scales for each article --or 54 total judgments--for each of the 40 students to make. Since 20 of the women were under the impression that an article had been authored by a female while the other 20 thought the article had been authored by a male, it was possible to compare student reactions to the same article, depending on male and female authorship. Three of these comparisons showed no difference between male and female authorship, seven favored the female and 44 favored the male authors. This is over 80% of the comparisons favoring the male authors, implying a rather strong anti-feminine bias.

However, all of the comparisons involved the authors of scholarly journal articles. One of the well known features of journal authorship is that the articles, at least the overwhelming majority of them, are written by college professors. In fact, many journals display the

Institutional affiliation of the author as prominently as the author's name. Given this practice of journals, it is not at all accurate to say that women are prejudiced against all women, as Goldberg's title implies.² Women may be prejudiced against academic women, they may even be prejudiced against prestigious women, but one may hardly extend that tendency as a blanket assertion to all other women.

To explore further differences in prejudice toward women, Pheterson, Kiesler and Goldberg conducted a second study at Connecticut College.³ Using a 2x2x2 factorial design, 120 women students were shown paintings attributed to either (a) a male or female artist, and were told the painting was either (b) a winner or an entry in an art contest, by an artist facing either (c) high or low personal odds of success. The investigators asked a total of five questions of the 120 women to measure the three areas of concern. Three of the five questions showed no statistical differences whatever. Still, the authors argued that women were biased against women on the basis of questions concerning the "technical competence" and "artistic future" of the artist. The results showed a significant interaction between the sex of the artist and the status of the painting based on the two questions. No differences were reported when paintings of men and women were described as winners. When paintings were described as entries, however, men's works were evaluated significantly higher on technical competence and

on the probability of future success for the artist.

In the last study to be reviewed, Miller and McRaynolds presented a persuasive message favoring an expanded ABM missile system to students in a great issues course.⁴ In all conditions, the message source was identified as a Ph.D. in nuclear physics but was represented to half the students as a male and to the other half as a female. In this study both male and female students received a message from, ostensibly, male and female message sources. Scales of communicator competence, based on prior factor analytic research were administered.⁵ In addition, a seven-point scale of persuasiveness (Strongly Favor to Strongly Opposed) was also administered.

The results of this study failed to show any differences in the persuasiveness of the messages attributed to male or female communicators. On the issue of communicator competence, both sexes viewed the female message source as less competent than the male. Further, this tendency was more pronounced for females than for males.

This trio of studies provides impressive, but not conclusive, evidence that women are prejudiced towards other women. It should be kept in mind that all the evaluations were based on communications attributed to, or concerning, unknown and/or hypothetical females. A real-world investigation has been completed by Ferber and Huber.⁶ In their study, 1,300 college students were asked to evaluate former

Instructors. The most favorable evaluations were those "of women teachers by women students...."⁷

While a number of reasons have been advanced for these two divergent lines of research, several may be discounted. It has been speculated that women attending small colleges may be more traditional than those in large state universities.⁸ However, if this hypothesis were accurate, the Michigan State study⁹ should not have corroborated the Connecticut College studies.¹⁰ Apparently, the distinction does not lie in the size of the school.

Ferber and Huber also speculated that women's attitudes may have changed since the early studies were conducted. Probably because of the time overlap, Ferber and Huber did not review Miller and McReynolds. However, the complete pattern is rather clear: the Goldberg study was published in 1968; the follow-up study appeared in 1971;¹¹ the final study was done in 1973.¹² During that time period there seems to have been no change in the results obtained. In fact, if the "changing attitudes over time" hypothesis were accurate, Miller and McReynolds should have gotten results highly similar to those obtained by Ferber and Huber. Thus, the variable does not seem to be point-in-time.

In each instance of observed bias toward females the communicators have been personally unknown to the students.¹³ In the one instance of favorable evaluations the teachers were well known to the students.¹⁴

Noting this distinction, one explanation immediately comes to mind.

It may be argued that women teachers were favorably evaluated because of prolonged interaction or personal affinity. If this speculation is true, the general tendency of women to denigrate one another could still exist. Even in the real world, women might still exhibit a bias toward other women if they were personally unknown to each other. To explore this issue, the question to be answered here is: When both listener and speaker are unknown to one another, do listeners of each sex tend to differentially evaluate presentations by speakers of each sex?

Procedure

The components of this study are: (a) male and female evaluators, (b) male and female communicators, and (c) relative anonymity among listeners and speakers. All these features were available among public speaking classes at Indiana University. The public speaking course is organized so that the final student speaking assignment is delivered to an unfamiliar audience of fellow students. Each student goes to another section of the course to deliver the final speech. The speakers are given letter grades by each fellow student in the audience. To insure that personal feelings did not interfere with awarded grades, the evaluations of other student speakers from the same section as the speaker were discarded. It is possible

that some audience members may have known a few speakers personally; however, on a campus of over 30,000 students, the chances of personal friendships grossly affecting the study results are minimal.

It should be emphasized that this assignment is a regular and quite well known feature of the course. When students make speech evaluations of other student speakers, they are performing an expected and usual element of the course. Moreover, the student evaluations typically form the basis for the actual grade received by the speaker. It cannot be argued that awarding grades is a contrived exercise, from either the speaker's or the listener's viewpoint. Hence, overtones of the "laboratory" atmosphere which occasionally contaminate investigations, have been minimized in this study.

All students were randomly assigned both to the day of presentation and to the speaking order on the day when they spoke. The sample of speech evaluations for the study was drawn only from the second day of the speeches. A single day was selected to avoid the possibility of an order effect based on the day of presentation, though it did reduce the possible number of evaluations. Sampling this specific day also insured that all student evaluators had one day of experience with the general format of the assignment.

Finally, the number of male and female evaluations were balanced

for every speaker. For each female evaluation of a speaker, there is a matching male evaluation of that same speaker. In cases where there were an uneven number of male and female evaluators, cases were randomly discarded to achieve numerical equality. This feature was introduced to insure a balance on all sex-based comparisons.

Results and Discussion

Data were gathered from 502 student evaluators. Following the advice of Edwards (1967), cases were randomly discarded to achieve an equal number of student evaluations in all four conditions of the study.¹⁵ The analysis presented is based on the responses of 484 students.

Table 1 presents the mean grades awarded by male and female student evaluators to male and female student speakers. The mean grades are virtually identical. There is no effect due to the sex of the evaluator ($F(1,420) = .75$). There is no effect due to the sex of the speaker ($F(1,420) = .76$). There is no interaction ($F(1,420) = .13$).

Insert Table 1 about here.

It may very well be true that college aged persons are prejudiced towards hypothetical females. These data, on the other hand, demonstrate that college aged persons harbor no prejudice toward real communicators of either sex even when the communicators are personally unknown. Thus, we have eliminated as a reason for anti-feminine bias the variable of personally knowing the communicator.

There are, however, still some differences between studies showing bias and those which do not. One difference is that all the laboratory studies, but none of the field studies, show bias. The laboratory/field dichotomy may be a promising approach for future research, though it is hard to say whether exploring it would yield more information about bias or about methodology. The most important difference seems to be that bias appears in those cases where the stimulus person whose performance is being evaluated is both hypothetical and unknown. When the stimulus person is either known or real, bias does not appear.

In analyzing the two lines of research, a distinction needs to be made, which Goldberg fails to do, between the message and the message source. In practice, of course, the distinction becomes blurred. Indeed, the object of all these studies has been to determine whether sex has an impact on the blurring process. Thus, when one seeks an explanation for the ways in which sex of the message

source does or does not operate to influence judgments of messages, the theoretical distinction must be clear. Our explanation--in keeping with past research--will focus upon the source of the message.

Keeping in mind this distinction between messages and message sources, the role of stereotypes may throw light on the question of why bias appears in some studies but not in others. Stereotypes, much maligned, play a necessary and important role in the judgments we make about message sources. Thus, it may be that when we are asked to judge a message in a situation when we know nothing about the individual source, we rely on stereotypes for judgments of the source. Then, the judgment of the source influences the judgment of the message itself. [In fact, it may not be possible for receivers to completely separate source and message. Even when no source is mentioned, listeners have a tendency to make judgments of a surrogate source, i.e., the person or institution simply presenting the message becomes a kind of "source".]⁶ So if women are asked to judge an article written by a woman about whom they are told only her name, it is not surprising that cultural stereotypes play an important part. However, when a real woman is the message source, the stereotype plays a lesser role because other information is available to use in judging the individual, and bias does not appear. The blurring of message and message source

appears in both cases, but stereotyped reactions play, necessarily, a smaller role when other information is available.

The data of this study provide only the hypothesis about stereotyping, not any evidence to support it. There is, however, some supporting evidence available in the literature of prejudice. For instance, Yinger and Simpson cite a number of studies which show that interracial contact tends to break down white prejudice toward blacks.¹⁷ Perhaps more directly, Glock et. al. found that negative stereotypes about Jews are less accepted by Gentile teenagers when they number Jews among their friends than when they do not.¹⁸ The results of the present study would suggest that a similar mechanism could be operating here, with personal contact breaking down stereotyped responses.

But, whatever the case, it is now clear that judgments about the performance of females differ considerably depending on whether the women being judged are real or hypothetical. To suggest, as Goldberg's study does, that women in general are prejudiced against women in general, would seem to be both an overstatement and an oversimplification.

Footnotes

1. Philip A. Goldberg, "Are Women Prejudiced Against Women?", Transaction 5 (April, 1968): 28-30.
2. In fairness, there is a more careful conclusion drawn in the text of Goldberg's article. He wrote: "Women--at least these young college women--are prejudiced against female professionals. . . ." (p. 30) Unfortunately, this caution is not reflected in his title and is generally ignored by others.
3. Gail I. Pheterson, Sara B. Kiesler and Philip A. Goldberg, "Evaluation of the Performance of Women as a Function of their Sex, Achievement and Personal History," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 19 (July, 1971): 114-118.
4. Gerald R. Miller and Michael McReynolds, "Male Chauvinism and Source Competence: A Research Note," Speech Monographs 40 (June, 1973): 154-155.
5. David K. Berlo, James B. Lemert and Robert J. Metz, "Dimensions for Evaluating the Acceptability of Message Sources," Public Opinion Quarterly 33 (Winter, 1969-70): 563-576.
6. Marianne Abeles Ferber and Joan Althaus Huber, "Sex of the Student and Instructor: A Study of Student Bias," American Journal of Sociology 80 (January, 1973): 949-963.

7. Ferber and Huber, 956.
8. Ferber and Huber, 961.
9. Miller and McReynolds.
10. Goldberg; Pheterson, et. al.
11. Pheterson, et. al.
12. Miller and McReynolds.
13. Goldberg; Pheterson, et. al.; Miller and McReynolds.
14. Ferber and Huber.
15. Allen L. Edwards, Statistical Methods (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967).
16. Paul D. Holtzman, "Confirmation of Ethos as a Confounding Element in Communication Research," Speech Monographs 33 (November, 1966): 464-466; James C. McCroskey and Robert E. Dunham, "Ethos: A Confounding Element in Communication Research," Speech Monographs 33 (November, 1966): 456-463.
17. J. H. Yinger and G. E. Simpson, "Techniques for Reducing Prejudice: Changing the Prejudiced Person," In Psychology and Race, ed. P. Wilson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Education, 1973).
18. Charles Y. Glock, Robert Wuthnow, Jane Allyn Piliavin and Metta Spencer, Adolescent Prejudice (New York: Harper and Row, 1975): 125-129.

TABLE 1
Mean Grades Awarded by
Student Judges to Student Speakers^a

Critic Sex	Speaker Sex	
	Male	Female
Male	11.69	11.89
Female	11.89	11.98

^aThe scale runs from A+ (15) to F- (1). A score of 12 would equal a B+.